

KATHY CASTOR
14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

SELECT COMMITTEE ON
THE CLIMATE CRISIS
CHAIR

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND
COMMERCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0914

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

2052 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3376

DISTRICT OFFICE:

4144 NORTH ARMENIA AVENUE
SUITE 300
TAMPA, FL 33607
(813) 871-2817

www.castor.house.gov

July 19, 2019

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
State of Florida
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Re: Urge Thorough Review of TECO Big Bend Fracked Gas Plant Expansion

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Citizens of our great state are looking to you for leadership at a critical time in the state's history – a time when the impacts and the costs of the climate crisis are escalating rapidly. The decisions you make today are more important than ever and will determine whether or not Florida is livable for generations to come.

Specifically, I respectfully request that you and the Florida Cabinet, sitting as the Power Plant Siting Board, make a thorough review of Tampa Electric Company's (TECO) Big Bend project as required by the Power Plant Siting Act. A determination of need must be fully undertaken to protect citizens and shareholders alike prior to any certification. TECO has not been asked to demonstrate, as called for in the Siting Act, that the project can actually "[m]eet the electrical energy needs of the state in an orderly, reliable, and timely fashion." TECO also has not been asked to show that the project would "serve and protect the broad interests of the public," especially the interests of Floridians who are experiencing mounting costs, health effects, catastrophic storm and flooding impacts from the emission of greenhouse gases. As policymakers, the Siting Board should take a broader view of its role and the impact of utility siting decisions. Decisions of this consequence based only upon narrow administrative interpretations are inadequate measures of the detrimental consequences to Florida's environment, economy and our way of life.

TECO's own information demonstrates the necessity for a determination of need. The changes contemplated by TECO are so significant with a proposed doubling of the electrical output and the use of a different dirty fuel source - fracked natural gas - that TECO is thereby proposing a new plant. It seems clear that TECO's project would make major changes that would then fall squarely under language from the Florida Statutes that says "no construction of any new electrical power plant or expansion in steam generating capacity as measured by an increase in the maximum

electrical generator rating of any existing electrical power plant may be undertaken without first obtaining certification” (section 403.506(1) F.S.). Furthermore, Florida Statutes provide that only modifications which increase the electrical output of a unit to no greater capacity than the maximum electrical generator rating of the existing generator should be allowed without a full review (section 403.506(2) F.S.). TECO states that its project would more than double the electrical output of the old Unit 1 at Big Bend. Unit 1 would then be generating 1,090 megawatts, whereas the old Unit 1 generated 445 megawatts. TECO also discloses that it would add 200 megawatts relative to the maximum electrical generator rating of old Units 1 and 2 combined (Unit 2 is also 445 megawatts), and add 740 megawatts relative to the electrical output of the old Unit 1. Either way, TECO’s own information would seem to have the project fall under the language and certainly the spirit of section 403.506 F.S. requiring a determination of need.

A thorough review by the Siting Board also would determine TECO’s ability to “meet the electrical energy needs of the state in an orderly, reliable, and timely fashion.” The Siting Board should consider whether the project would actually “effect a reasonable balance” between the unproven “need” for a dirty, carbon-producing project with a longer life and the huge environmental and social costs on Floridians. It is likely that TECO’s project would not meet Florida’s needs because to proceed as TECO proposes would require several billion dollars to build and operate the plant compared to less expensive, yet reliable clean energy alternatives. There are alternatives that exist and are in use elsewhere, including TECO’s parent company Emera, that would meet Florida’s needs and apparently cost about \$2 billion less than TECO’s project. (In fact, Emera’s home page on the internet highlights in big, bold letters: “Investing in renewable, cleaner and more reliable power.”)

Certification must hinge on consideration of whether the project will “[e]ffect a reasonable balance between the need for the facility and the impacts upon air and water quality, fish and wildlife, water resources, and other natural resources of the state resulting from the construction and operation of the facility.” The finding in another recent power plant certification case recognized what has become plain to Floridians, “the need to exigently address [the climate crisis] is compelling.” Evidence offered during the course of the proceeding established that certifying TECO’s project as presently described would contribute to the climate crisis by emitting tremendous amounts of greenhouse gases that cause billions of dollars in damages – to individuals and property alike. As policymakers, not administrative finders of fact, the Siting Board should review and insist that TECO prove that its project would not just produce less harm. The Siting Board should instead require TECO to positively serve and protect Florida and Floridians, especially the most vulnerable people and communities, while still providing reliable power. The most reliable power likely will be clean energy and conservation initiatives that currently are practically ignored by utilities in the Sunshine State.

Electricity generation across America is moving to clean energy and Florida’s future should not be tied to dirty, carbon-polluting sources that cause severe impacts and massive costs of the climate crisis. A complete review can result in a better decision. For example, in the state of Indiana, the Northern Indiana Service Company has been grappling with the future of its coal plants. In response to a 2018 request for proposals, the utility realized that wind and solar were the most cost-effective replacements for their coal generation and would save their customers billions of dollars. The price of renewables was so attractive that Indiana plans to end coal

electricity generation within ten years. The benefits of wind and solar were in marked contrast to similar proposals in 2016 when switching to natural gas was seen as most cost-effective. Cost reductions in wind, solar and storage are happening so quickly that additional time may result in greater cost saving for customers and a better quality of life for our neighbors. Indeed, recent record-breaking power purchase agreements for solar photovoltaics combined with battery storage indicate that the economic benefits of renewables are still growing and the time between innovative solutions is shrinking.

Closer to home, the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) just days ago approved a new three-year plan for Georgia Power's energy mix. The Georgia PSC called on the utility giant to add 2,210 megawatts of renewable power, the largest increase in Georgia's history. It appears that most of that will be in large-scale solar power, a move away from coal and also away from a fracked gas alternative as well. Georgia will nearly double its renewable energy capacity by the end of the three-year plan. In deciding, Georgia PSC chairman Bubba McDonald said a statement that energy policymakers both public and private should take to heart, "I determined Georgia has the ability to add significantly more renewable energy and solar energy using a market-based approach without any upward pressure on the rate payers and no state subsidies." Commissioners also approved the decertification of a number of existing power plants, including five coal-burning units. The Sunshine State lags behind many states in alternative energy and now we lag behind our smaller neighbor to the north too. Your decision on the TECO plant can serve as a new beginning for Florida that avoids the escalating costs and most harmful impacts of the climate crisis.

Any decision regarding TECO's new plant should be reviewed thoroughly by the Siting Board based upon the language and spirit of the Power Plant Siting Act. The Siting Board also should go beyond a strict legal analysis in deciding to review the project prior to certification because any decision TECO makes or is allowed to make will be with us for decades. Therefore the need for an efficient, economical decision that safeguards citizens and shareholders alike, and the need to "get it right" for Florida's environment and economy requires that the Siting Board take a broad view of its role and the impact of utility siting decisions. As Indiana and Georgia demonstrate, states that have undertaken a broad analysis, find that clean energy alternatives are more cost-effective for customers and smarter decisions overall.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14

Cc: Attorney General Ashley Moody
Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis
Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried